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Leroy Garrett, Editor

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If God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't He more surely care for you, O men of little faith? – *Matt. 7:30*

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The Word Abused . . .

"LIVING IN ADULTERY"

This is an expression that I have heard all my life, and due to the exposure I have had in "Church of Christ" colleges, it is a term I have used myself, especially in my younger days when I was not as conscious of how prone we are to abuse the scriptures. We warp and twist the Bible by imposing upon it concepts that it does not teach.

Needless to say that we do not read of "living in adultery" in the Bible, and, if one stops to think about it, it is one of those expressions that is sheer nonsense. How can one possibly *live* in adultery? We can read of *adultery* in the scriptures, and of committing adultery, but never of *living* in adultery. One may as well talk about "living in stealing" or "living in lying" or "living in murder" as *living in adultery.* Such terms are nonsense and you can be assured that such talk as "living in adultery" was invented by the clergy so as to impose some anathema on somebody.

Interestingly enough, this is not used on some carnal brother who gives his life to chasing after women. If he sleeps illicitly with a woman, he may gain the epithet of *fornicator* or *adulterer,* but he will not be "living in adultery." This is a unique epithet for a unique situation, and I think I have never heard it so used except in our own circles. No one really "lives in adultery" except that poor soul who is "unscripturally divorced" and remarries. If he or she didn't remarry, but simply "had an affair" or several of them, he or she might be guilty of adultery in the eyes of our folk, but not "living in adultery." You have to get divorced unscripturally and *then* remarry. That will do it. You are then "living in adultery" —whatever that means!

It is of course possible for people to commit adultery again and again, just as they can steal again and again. If that makes the first *living* in adultery, then the second would be *living* in stealing. The whole thing is so silly that I rebuke myself for ever succumbing to such doctrinal folly.

I fear that we have allowed some of our preachers of yesteryear to lead us too far afield by way of *their* interpretation of what Jesus says about divorce and remarriage, and we have those among us who continue to keep this risky teaching current. Many families among us with divorces in their past have learned to brace themselves when the subject comes up, for almost certainly they'll hear still again that they are "living in adultery," even after 15 or 20 or 30 years of marriage. Others of course have long since been driven from us by those who champion such strait-laced views. Some have been turned away who would otherwise come to Jesus, for, being divorced people, they were told they were "living in adultery," a sin they must repent of before they can come into the church, which means that they must break up their home in order to come to the Lord.

I've known divorced believers, who did not separate for "a scriptural cause" to wait around for years for their estranged spouse to marry (which would mean the ex-spouse was *then* guilty of adultery) so that they would then have "a scriptural reason" to remarry. We've had families torn asunder over this doctrine because some preacher convinced a couple that they had no right to marry following a divorce that dates back to their teenage years. Children or no children, they have to break it all up and separate, for they are "living in adultery." They are told that this is what Jesus teaches!

The girl that makes a mistake by marrying some "Church of Christ" brute is told that she can't divorce him so long as he is not unfaithful to her, which means to be guilty of adultery. No matter how severe the hell is that he creates for her, she must hang in there the rest of her life. *If* she does leave him, she has to live alone the rest of her life —unless, after leaving him, the brute takes off after women or marries. In that case she can marry again, for *he* is then the guilty party. But if he's the kind that gets more kick out of beating women than making love to them and therefore never gets sexually involved, then our young sister, still in her teens and with a baby to raise, has to cut it all alone the rest of her life, regardless of how much some decent guy, even if a Baptist, loves her and the baby and wants to make a home for them. They would both be "living in adultery" and so that would be against the law. That is what these bruisers say that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, teaches!

Something is badly wrong when serving Jesus is made to be unbearable, mean, unjust, and oppressive. God is *for* man, not against him. His religion uplifts man and makes him happy. Jesus insisted that "My burden is easy and my yoke is light" and one of his apostles assures us that his commandments are not grievous. To make Jesus' into a legalist by assuming that through manipulation of circumstances we can twist his words so that they fit our practice is to abuse the scriptures.

Jesus is hardly a lawmaker in reference to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. He rather lays down principles and ideals, which, due to life's misfortunes, we may fall far short of approximating. There is no question but that he taught against divorce, just as God had enjoined restrictions for the sabbath. But conditions may alter principles, for principles are always given to serve and free man, not to oppress or enslave him. We must believe that Jesus will accept a person wherever he is, that he will raise him up and give him hope and make him part of the new humanity.

Jesus didn't talk to troubled souls the way these preachers do that we've referred to. The woman at Jacob's well was such a one, and it is likely that she frequented that inconvenient source of water so as to escape the austerity of the "righteous" women at the city well. "Go, and call your husband," Jesus said to her. When she replied that she had no husband, the Lord said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband." That would have

been the time to have talked about "living in adultery," for she was no doubt *committing* adultery every time she slept with that sixth man, out of wedlock. But suppose she had been married to him, would there have been any rebuke on the part of Jesus? "You have had five husbands," he says to her, and he seems to recognize the marriages. We may presume that she had these *one at a time!* His rebuke, was that she now lived with a man *outside* marriage. She wasn't "living in adultery" but committing adultery. But I cannot see that Jesus would have raised the matter at all if that sixth man had been her husband.

Now if our preachers want to be like Jesus and rebuke people for living with mates *out of wedlock,* I for one will applaud their concern. But to tell divorced people, who are now legally married, that they are "living in adultery," well. . . if they'll just show me Jesus doing that.

It makes an interesting question as to what the sequel to the story of the woman at the well might have been. I can see Jesus saying to her, "If you want to be my disciple, *first* marry that man you're living with, and then spend the rest of your life seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness." But the editor of the *Heretic Detector* could be expected to say, once he had examined her marital history, "Now, marriage number 1 is the only scriptural marriage. You are to go back and see if you can't find him, or else. . ." The liberties that men take with precious souls of God is frightening. No wonder the scriptures warn us about being teachers, for we will indeed receive the heavier judgment. I am well aware of those passages in Mt. 5:32 and 19:9, along with Mk. 10:11-12 and Ro. 7:2-3, that men use to deduce their legalistic theories, and I am persuaded that they draw from them unwarranted conclusions. To say the least, there are problems that should discourage dogmatism. We err in making passages mean more than is really in them, and we have a way of being all too sure when the evidence at hand suggests a more moderate view.

Take Mt. 5:32: "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

Is Jesus here teaching that it is wrong to marry a divorced woman, that the man who does so is guilty of adultery? Don't be too sure!

This passage has its problems. It says that a woman "commits adultery" when her husband divorces her. Do you really believe that a woman is guilty of adultery just by being divorced? That is what it says, "Whoever puts away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery." This is explained by adding to what Jesus says, " . . . causeth her to commit adultery *if she marries again."* But he doesn't say that, does he?

Mark, who was writing to Greeks, does not mention that point at all, but simply says, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her." And he adds something Matthew left out: "And if a woman shall put away her husband,

and be married to another, she committeth adultery." Since the Jews did not allow women to divorce their husbands, Matthew, writing to Jews, does not bother with that point. And Mark says not a word about "except for the cause of fornication," which should cause one to wonder who makes such a big deal of that point. Mt. 19:9 does mention that exception, but it is only a repetition of what he had already recorded in chapter 5.

Rom. 7:2-3 only shows what we all already recognize, which is why Paul is using it as an illustration, which is that a woman is bound to a man as long as he lives. If she joins herself to another while her husband still lives, she is an adulteress. It reminds us that bigamy is wrong.

That is about it when it comes to Jesus' "laws" on divorce and remarriage. Isn't that a bit on the sketchy side for us to be so dogmatic as to break up marriages and pronounce anathemas upon devoted couples who have been serving God for many years only because there is a divorce back in the closet?

But we are told that God only needs to say something once, and he has made Himself clear enough in Mt. 5 and 19. Jesus plainly says that if a man divorces his wife, except for fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries her also commits adultery.

But is it really all that plain? Taking just what Matthew records, we still have the problem as to how a woman can be guilty of adultery simply by being divorced by her husband. And we have no information about the man who divorces her. Can he marry again? If he does, is he an adulterer if the cause of the divorce is *not* fornication, but innocent if it is? Jesus says nothing about what the man can do or not do. His concern is rather about what happens to the woman, and, oddly enough, to the man who might marry her.

Mark's record of what Jesus says takes a different direction. He simply says that if a man divorces his wife and marries another woman he commits adultery against her, saying nothing at all about exceptions. By the way, who is the *her* in "commits adultery against *her,"* the wife that is divorced or the second wife? Almost certainly the one being divorced, which shows that both accounts show special concern for the woman being put away, which may be a clue as to what Jesus is really getting at in all this.

With Mk. 10:11 in hand, one could conclude that when a man divorces his wife and marries again, he is sinning against the *first* wife (he commits adultery against *her)* but is not guilty of adultery with the second wife.

Well, I suppose I have succeeded in confusing you, which is partly my purpose. It *is* confusing; it *is* very difficult, and it is sketchy. We don't have enough information to draw up a lawbook on marriage and divorce. I am persuaded that Jesus intended no such detailed information. He wasn't even talking about conditions and causes for remarriage, but was rather rebuking the Pharisees for their flippant attitude toward women and

marriage and was showing the inviolability of the marriage bond, emphasizing "what therefore God has joined together let no man put asunder." That is the ideal.

I'll share with you how one highly respected biblical scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, approaches these problems, including the one of how a woman can be an adulteress simply by being divorced.

The divorcing man is the culprit that Jesus is after, according to Lenski. The Pharisees had permitted him to put away the little woman simply by handing her a piece of paper —"for any cause." Jesus is showing what that does to her, and in doing so he uses *passive* voice, which almost all commentators treat as if it were *active* voice. The phrase "causes her to commit adultery" is passive, not active. Active voice is like "I kill" while passive is "I am killed," which means it expresses action done to you. So it is with "commits adultery" on the part of the man who marries the divorced woman. That is, he has the action of adultery done to him; he doesn't do the adultery himself.

The active voice of this same verb appears in verses 27-28: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery' (that is *active)*, but I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery (again it is *active*, the subject is doing the acting) with her in his heart."

But in verse 32 he changes to *passive* voice, which means that the divorced woman does not herself commit adultery, but she "has adultery done to her" or the like, or as Lenski puts it, she is "stigmatized as an adulteress" by being put away, the community supposing she must be an unchaste woman or her husband would not take such action against her. So with the man who marries her. Jesus is not saying he is, guilty of adultery in marrying her, but, joining himself to a stigmatized woman, he has to share in the disrepute that her first husband brought upon her. The man who wants to divorce his wife, and the Pharisees were giving a lot of them their wishes, is the great offender to Jesus. He is bringing reproach both upon the woman he divorces and the man who would chance to marry her. So, Jesus isn't at all condemning a man for marrying a divorced woman.

As for "except for fornication" in Mt. 5:32, this stands as the only exception to what he is saying. If the woman is *unchaste* (which is a better translation; there's another word for adultery or fornication), then in being put away she has brought her own bad name upon herself, and so the husband cannot be blamed for the ill repute either she or her next husband may suffer.

Lenski insists that Jesus is not concerned here with who can or cannot remarry, but that he is attacking the dishonor shown to marriage by the Pharisees when they toss divorces around like pancakes —except that Lenski does not use that metaphor!

Well, I am not saying that Lenski is right, but he is being honest with the text, and he is making a sincere and responsible effort to face up to the problems in the light of the original Greek. Surely he deserves to be heard.

We can be sure of some things in these scriptures. *Divorce is a sin!* Even though Moses in Dt. 24:1 allowed it, Jesus told the Pharisees that God never really intended it —it was allowed only because of "your hardness of heart." A man becomes one with his wife, and only with her, and not with his parents. He is to leave his parents and become one with his wife. God makes them one, and so the union is inviolable. "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder," the Lord warns them.

There is no assurance in these verses that Jesus recognizes *any reason at all* for divorce. A man is not to put away his wife (period). The reason is because God made them one from the beginning. If he does divorce his wife, he has sinned against God, whether he marries again or not. But he also sins against the woman, for in divorcing her he makes it appear that she is an adulteress, for otherwise he would not be putting her away. Moreover, he injures the man who marries her, for it also hurts his reputation, making it appear that he has married an unchaste woman when he really hasn't.

The only exception to this is unchastity on the part of the wife. If she is unchaste, he is doing her no personal injury in divorcing her; that is, his sins are not compounded by hurting the woman (and her new husband) as well as offending God. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the man is justified in divorcing her. He still may be sinning against God in divorcing, *even if she is unchaste.* Man is not to divorce his wife —not for any reason at all! —that is what I understand Jesus to be saying in M t. 19:1-9. Otherwise he would not be contradicting what Moses said in Dt. 24:1. Moses said they could divorce; Jesus says they can't.

But, as we have said, these are ideals and principles more than rules. Divorces will come, that is life, and we must accept them as necessary evils, oftentimes as the *lesser* evil. But still someone has sinned. Divorce is contrary to what God intended even from the beginning. As with all sin, God gives us the opportunity to make a new start. The sin of divorce can be forgiven and the separated people can make a new life, each going his separate ways. When a divorced person remarries, he of she *is* married, and we have to conclude that God recognizes that marriage like all the rest. With the past forgotten, they can start afresh and honor God in their lives —and not divorce again! And it has to be wrong to say they are "living in adultery" or that they were "unscripturally divorced." There is no such thing as a *scriptural* divorce —except under Moses and the Pharisees!

I can only conclude that Jesus takes people as he finds them, and makes them into a New Creation. That is what it is all about. However fouled up one's life is, however many times he has been married, however full the closet is of all sorts of skeletons, still Jesus is there saying, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." And he adds, thank God, he adds, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." —*the Editor*

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What Kind of a Book is the Bible? . . .

THE MAKING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

This would better be entitled *The Making of the Old Testament Scriptures*, or better still . . . the *Old Covenant Scriptures*, for that literature extending from Genesis to Malachi is not the Old Testament or Old Covenant, but rather the scriptures produced by a covenant people. Jer. 31:32 plainly says that the covenant with Israel was made "when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke." Israel was a covenant people before *any* of the Old Covenant scriptures were produced. Dt. 5:2-3 is equally clear: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day."

The same is true of the New Covenant (It was of course the *new* that made the first old), which was ratified on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus was its mediator (Heb. 9:15), and it became a reality when men accepted him as the Christ and obeyed him in baptism. Neither the Old or the New Covenants depended on literature for their existence, except that the Old was burned into tables of stone by the finger of God, the New being written upon tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:3). Such books as *Romans* and *Galatians* are not, therefore, parts of the New Covenant, for the second Covenant had long been in existence before those letters were ever written. This helps to explain why some of us are saying that fellowship with Christ is a matter of covenantal relationship, based upon faith and baptism, and not a matter of conformity of interpretation of the New Covenant *scriptures.* The early Christians were one together, sharing in the fellowship of the Spirit, long before there were any New Covenant scriptures. Those scriptures enhance and strengthen the fellowship of the Spirit, but they do not create it except as they reveal the nature of the covenant that Christ mediates.

So Israel was a covenant people all along, from the time that God called them out of Egypt and made a covenant with them on Mt. Sinai. If the Messiah had come then, there would never have been any Old Testament scriptures, but the Old Covenant would have been just as real. So with the New Covenant. If Jesus had returned within 15 or 20 years of his advent, there would never have been any *New Testament*, as we call it, but the New Covenant would have nonetheless existed. God wrote *that* on human hearts, beginning at Pentecost. If you are part of that covenant, it is because God has written it upon your heart for Jesus' sake, and not because you have memorized something from some book. That one Book may have revealed to you the covenant, but that Book, whether in the form of the Old or New Covenant scriptures, or both, is *not* the covenant.

It is to be expected that in the long history that followed the making of the first covenant that a body of literature would emerge. Surely it was according to God's plan that such would be the case, for in that history God was molding a nation as well as a religion, both serving crucial roles in presenting the Messiah to the world. In creating a nation He also created scriptures designed to educate people in reference to the Messiah. Prophets not only spoke but they also wrote, offering both consolation and judgment, preparing Israel for her ultimate mission.

The scriptures that grew out of the first covenant were the Bible of the primitive church. John 2:22 for example. "When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." Jesus taught his disciples that they were to "believe all that the prophets have spoken" about him (Lk. 24:26), and in verse 27 we have: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." And in verse 44 the Lord divides those scriptures in the way we still find them: "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." These were the scriptures of the early church.

Thus Paul refers to the "holy scriptures" in Ro. 1:2 and to the "sacred writings" in 2 Tim. 3:15. In 1 Cor. 15 he argues that the death and resurrection of Jesus is "according to the scriptures," and in Gal. 4:30 he asks, "What does the scripture say?" All this is, of course, the scriptures of the Jewish church. Jesus made the same use of them, as he did in the synagogue at Nazareth: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21), and more generally in Mk. 12:24: "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God?"

All this means that the Church of Christ received its *first* scriptures, what we call the *Old Testament*, from the Jewish church, and that these were the "Bible" of the church for the first generation.

The question as to how these Jewish scriptures emerged and were finally gathered into a canon, some writings being included and others excluded, is another problem. This was no problem to the early church, for they were Jews, and they simply carried their "Bible" with them into the new experience, which they believed to be the fulfillment of those very scriptures. Jesus had done the same, for he too was a Jew, and he too had his "Bible" to start with. And surely he believed that he was fulfilling those scriptures.

The threefold division that Jesus spoke of, "the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" (writings), goes back at least to the early second century B. C., for in *Ecclesiasticus* (about 180 B. C.), written by one Jeshua ben Sira, there are several references to "the law and the prophets and other books," albeit that particular reference comes in the preface, written by Sira's grandson some 60 years later. But Sira, in his survey of divine history, not only reveals a detailed knowledge of the Old Covenant scriptures, but follows

an order that indicates a division between the Torah (law) and the prophets. For example, he speaks of "the twelve prophets," which in those days were viewed all as one book, and in his survey he passes from the law to the prophetic era.

The Persians allowed the Jews to bring the "law of your God" from their Babylonian exile (Ez. 7:14), which may be a reference to the law (first five books) as distinguished from the prophets. But we really don't know what "the law" was that Ezra read to the people (Neh. 8). It may have been only part of the Pentateuch. But from that time until the days of Christ the Old Covenant scriptures have always been substantially the same as they are now, though differently arranged and were counted as 24 (Josephus counts 22) instead of our 39. But that comes from reducing "the twelve prophets" to but one book, and by Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah counting as one book each. And they were arranged for size, so as to fit scrolls, rather than chronological or logical order.

Jewish tradition has it that it was Ezra and the men of the Great Synagogue that collected those writings that were considered inspired of God and formed them into what might be called a canon. In the rabbinic tradition that built up through the centuries each book of the scriptures was inspired because it was the work of a prophet. To do this they had to assign *Job* to Moses, *Ruth* to Samuel, and, strangely enough, *Esther* to Mordecai, whom they made into a prophet. But they ended up with the same books the Jewish church accepted in Jesus' time and which we accept now. It is interesting, however, that those old Jews drove a hard bargain when it came to "being inspired of the Holy Spirit," a gift they assigned only to a prophet. This led one rabbi to write: "When Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi died, the Holy Spirit left Israel."

An illustration of this is the place given to *Ecclesiasticus,* a book highly prized by the rabbis, but not accepted for public reading in the synagogue (though suitable for private study, if not too seriously!) because it came after that period of Spirit-inspired prophets. A few books (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Esther) have been questioned as truly canonical, but they have in the long run been accepted. Still others, not in our canon, have been highly esteemed by both the Jewish and Christian churches, and have been given sort of "secondary" canonicity. These are Tobit, Judith, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and the prophet Baruch. One will find these in "Catholic" Bibles, such as the splendid *Jerusalem Bible,* and in reading them one may well suppose that he is in still more of the riches of the Old Covenant scriptures. But the Jews have never given these books *prime* rating as inspired scripture, though they are included in the Septuagint, which is the Greek version of the Old Covenant scriptures, rendered about 200 B.C.

The Septuagint was completely Jewish, designed to fill the needs of Greek-speaking Jews that were scattered over the Mediterranean world, but it finally came into disrepute with the Jewish seat of authority in Palestine. This was due mainly to the Septuagint becoming the Christian's Bible. Almost certainly it was the scriptures of Jesus and the

apostles, and it is believed that most of the quotations in the New Covenant scriptures from the *Old* are from the Greek Septuagint. So it was the point of reference in debates between the Christians and the unbelieving Jews. The Septuagint, for example, has *parthenos* (virgin) in Isa. 7:14, and the Christians would waylay the Jews with that fact, showing that their own authorities, two centuries since, recognized that Isaiah was pointing to the Messiah as being born of a virgin, which of course was Jesus.

The Septuagint also has all these extra books that the "Catholic" Bible has, which the Palestinian Jews never gave first class passage, so that gave them another reason for cooling on it. They proceeded to make still another Greek version of the *Old Testament,* rejecting the Septuagint, which they had by the second century A.D. pretty well surrendered to the Christian church. It shows the remarkable way in which God works. The production of the Septuagint was supposed to be a great blessing to the Jews of the Dispersion, and of course it was since it was their Bible for more than two centuries. But it turned out to be the Bible for the Christians, the one they used in converting so many Jews!

In accepting that as a fact we must also accept as a fact that the early church used a Greek *Old Testament* that contained the Apocrypha (the disputed books we've referred to). If Paul used a Bible containing *Maccabees* and *Tobit,* we can't be too hard on the Roman Catholics when they choose to. Even the Roman Catholics, however, give these extra books "deutero-canonical" status, which is only a secondary acceptance.

What happened here is that the Protestant churches followed the Jewish tradition of scripture, accepting whatever they accepted and rejecting whatever they rejected. The Jews first accepted the Apocrypha in the Septuagint because that was as early as 200 B.C. The canon was in process of being formed, so as time went on the Jews rejected books that they earlier only held in doubt. The Jews finally "closed" the canon at a gathering in Jamnia near the close of the first century A.D. Their scriptures were then the same as our present *Old Testament,* except for a different order. But these were the scriptures that they had accepted all along, with the disputed books fading in and out of acceptance, depending on circumstances and geography. But Jamnia finally nailed down forever what had long been assumed —that those books that "render the hands unclean," their strange way of identifying the books inspired by the Spirit, are those that presently make up our *Old Testament.*

The term *canon* may need some explanation. It is a Greek word meaning "straight rod" or "balance beam," and from that it took on the meaning of *normative.* So, canonical scriptures refers to those accepted as normative, and "the canon" is that collection determined as final.

It is evident, then, that the early church did not receive from Judaism a closed or fixed canon of scripture. Indeed, it used a Bible that had books that were finally rejected by the Jews, and through them by the Protestant churches. We can be sure that "the law and the prophets" were determined, but "the other writings" were more open. This is why we should not be surprised to find a reference to some of these doubtful books in the New Covenant scriptures, such as Jude's quotation from *Enoch* and his allusion to the *Assumption of Moses.*

But this is marginal. The Old Covenant scriptures that we have are those honored by God's people all back through the centuries. And they were initially so honored because they had upon them the mark of prophetic inspiration. The *man* had first to be accepted as a prophet of God, and then his writings. So it was God's gift of prophecy to His people that gave us the Old Covenant scriptures. As for all the sticky problems about the canon, which is more man's notion than it is God's anyway, we who make up His church can believe that we have in the Old Covenant scriptures what He wants us to have. This is because in creating and preserving a People for His great purposes, He also created and preserved a body of literature for their edification. He saw it through.

It is true that He also preserved the Apocrypha and these other books, and I for one will read them with great profit, which God surely intended. But they remain secondary to those writings produced in that era in which the Spirit of God was inspiring the prophets of Israel.

In our next we will study the making of the New Testament. —*the Editor*

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Travel Letters . . .

THE ISSUES "OUT THERE" AMONGST THEM

I am often asked by folk "back home" as to what the brethren are thinking here and there across the country. *What are the issues and problems out among the churches?* I am asked. It is a wise question, for one has a limited view of things if he is confined to his congregation or views "the brotherhood" only from his office window. Reading the papers can even be misleading since the news and issues are often slanted by the party perspective represented by the particular publication. Let's face it, a lot of our people just don't know what is going on. They wil1 awake one of these days and find their world so changed that they'll wonder where they've been all their lives. The purpose of this piece, therefore, is to share my experiences and insights as to some of the things that are going on, especially in terms of issues and problems.

These tend to come in clusters rather than singly. If there is *anyone* concern that dominates all others, it would be freedom in Christ, with all that this implies. So it may be viewed as the stem that holds the cluster of many more issues. Once brethren take that step toward freedom, they have to face the question as to just what this means. Are they now free *to* as well as free *from?* Our "free" churches are facing this. It is one thing to walk out and away from an oppressive situation, but another thing to take one's place as a responsible congregation in a community. They soon discover that they did not leave all their problems behind. When freedom is sought as an end itself rather than as the means of fulfillment and service, it is predictable that there will be problems.

As people break away from their traditional confines they take on the spirit of the explorer. Adventure becomes their thing. Not only do they discover a larger brotherhood, but an entirely new world of books, ideas, questions, and experiences. The door they have opened appears to have become a floodgate, and they become vulnerable to overexposure, getting too much too soon. Not only is their head in the clouds, which within itself may be all right, but their feet are dangling in the air, hardly touching solid ground. So this is probably our most critical problem just now, *learning to be free people in Jesus.* I meet people everywhere who have fought their way out of Babylon like Gang Busters, but they are not sure where they want to go, whether Jerusalem or Antioch, Athens or Rome, or perhaps some Eden somewhere, or nowhere at all. But some discover Jesus at a deeper level and this is beautiful.

If we look at the cluster itself, the Holy Spirit is one issue that stands out prominently. In virtually every church in the Restoration family, questions about the Spirit are persistent, and some are very concerned about speaking in tongues. Some have overreacted by dismissing missionaries, firing preachers and staff people, and "withdrawing" from the rank and file over irregular behavior in this area. Of all the issues this is the most nervous one, often evoking irrational and frenetic response. Elderships act as if they are frightened by their brethren who come up speaking in tongues. Our people are badly in need of that "one wise man among you" who can save our leadership from erratic and unloving behavior along these lines. Some "charismatics" on the other hand need to realize that love and forbearance may be as significant manifestations of the Spirit as tongues. Paul may give us the answer to all this in Gal. 6:15, if I may paraphrase: "Tongues or no tongues is not what matters, but being really changed into new and different people does matter."

But interest in the Spirit reaches far beyond the glossolalia thing. The church has probably never been as concerned for the Spirit's mission in the life of the believer as now. In all places I find interest in what the Spirit does for the saints *today*, beyond giving us the Bible. Many are discovering the Spirit as a continuing comforter (Ro. 8:26).

This shows itself in a renewed desire for the word of God. Our people are hungering and thirsting to a thrilling degree, and I think they are studying more searchingly, with a growing indifference to the traditions and doctrines of men, whether ours or the other fellow's. So, the Bible has become an issue: how to study it and how to interpret it aright. As a consequence more is being demanded of preachers and teachers. More questions are being asked and less and less is being taken for granted.

Nor is it amiss to say that Jesus himself is fast becoming an issue among us. Our folk are getting to where they'll talk about him as much or more than "the church." Many long to know *him,* not just about him. My lessons in homes and congregations alike are often about Jesus, the stories told by the evangelists, and the response is always enthusiastic. Even in Texas you'll find brethren who'll talk about the Lord as freely and as unashamedly as about the Dallas Cowboys!

Along with this they zero in on the grace of God —of all things —and even praise the Lord and talk about what God has done for them. We are taking a closer look as to what "the truth" is, and we are less inclined "to exalt ourselves as righteous and to set all others at naught."

The issues are of course many. Unity and fellowship are now a matter of conscious concern with many. There is a greater assurance of our security in Jesus, and along with it less confidence in our own righteousness. This is reflected not only in more prayer but in the way we pray - as if we are really talking to somebody. And the "last things" are more vigorously pursued, whether in terms of reading the prophecies in scripture or Hal Lindsey's interpretation of them.

On the "practical" side one can detect less interest in real estate holdings and church plants and more attraction for house meetings and prayer groups. The "institutional church" has long been under fire, along with all its gimmickry, and it will survive to the degree that it yields itself to the changing needs of the believers. The true nature of the Body of Christ is being given more careful scrutiny than in a long time, which should remind us that it was this kind of thinking that launched the Restoration Movement.

Under the more "practical" issues we have also the question of women's rights, which is going to be with us for a long time, and I think we'll see a gradual easing of the restrictions long imposed on our sisters —not to suggest that *all* limitations should be dropped. This will come with a broader concept of ministry. And there is the question of to bus or not to bus. That's *bus,* not *bust.* I visited one congregation where the "in" thing was for a family to buy a bus. This has become controversial among the Baptists and others, labeled as just that much more gimmickry. It is just now only *becoming* among us. And then there is the issue of preachers quitting, the whys and wherefores. There seems to be a consensus that it is just as well for some of them to quit, but more are doing so than should, or perhaps the wrong ones. In time we'll come to see, I think, that to quit

"preaching" may in some cases be but a transition to a higher call of God. We have all along taken too narrow a view of *serving the Lord.* The pulpit is only one place, and that quite obviously has its limitations.

Theologically, our folk were barely exposed to the issue of eschatology which greatly influenced the Christian world two generations ago, and hardly more so by the kerugma (nature of the gospel) a generation ago. The issue now in theological circles is hermeneutics, with all its questions on interpretation and meaning, and this time around we will be more profoundly influenced. The meaning and relevance of scripture is already an issue with us, however subtle it may be. Questions about the Bible as a book are now more serious, and its teachings are being interpreted more in the light of its culture and background. Some of our folk can even talk about "the Jewishness of Jesus" in explaining his teaching. The Old Testament (really, the Old Covenant scriptures!) is being taken more seriously —long overdue, I'd say.

But the hottest issue of all in so many places is "the authority of elders" and the eldership in general. This is due in part to the fact that elders have generally lagged behind in all the change over the past decade. They are neither as spiritual or as informed as many of those they seek to lead. They are often arbitrary and dogmatic, ruling more like a nervous board of an uneasy corporation than like a nurse caring for her own children. Shepherd-like traits are all too rare. This was tolerated with less difficulty back when our people were less enlightened. These little, frightened men are now driving lots of people completely away from us, while those who hang in have to settle for being driven up the wall.

This is the problem that I presently find to be the most urgent: *how about elders who run a tight ship and will allow no changes for the better?* I sit with some groups who have moved so far ahead of their elders in spiritual concern that it is as ludicrous as it is tragic. No business or professional organization would expect to survive that has the weak ruling over the strong. It is predictable that the authority of such men would be questioned. Extremes can also be expected, with some denying any place for elders at all.

It is a problem that we'll have with us awhile. As the younger set moves into the eldership in the coming years, which is already the case in lots of places, the image of "corporate executive" will diminish. Men will be elected to staggered terms rather than for life, and the point will be *pastoral* qualities rather than business or affluence. As for authority, this will emerge naturally from the exemplary life of the person. If we were all on a lifeboat in a struggle for our lives, we would not be inclined to argue about the "authority" of the Old Salt who knows the sea as well as he knows men. If a congregation is free to choose those that they would look to when they need help, they would come up with the right men to lead them. Few congregations are given this liberty anyway, for

elders usually select (or have veto power) other elders —like the cardinals and the pope do in Rome!

But the most encouraging thing about all these issues is that we do indeed have them. Concern and sensitivity are growing virtues among us. That we are becoming more and more worthy to raise issues brings us within that great cloud of witnesses that have always made the big difference in the ongoing of events. —*the Editor*

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"IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE"

Jim Hance

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I ask Thee, Lord, my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.

I wonder how many little children in the land have been trained to repeat these familiar lines as a nightly ritual at bed-time. I wonder too how many of them give much thought to what they're saying. "If I should die before I wake . . ." Do little children anticipate that possibility? For that matter, how often is it that we who are older think it really might happen *tonight?*

During 1971 I was asked to participate in 54 funerals. That's averaging just over one each week. I no longer keep count of such things, but I am sure that during the past ten years I have spoken in memorial services more than 300 times, hoping to help saddened families find comfort as they bury their dead. A brother once asked me whether I had become "hardened enough" to do it without "getting involved." I told him, "No!" And I hope I never do.

Through these years I've observed that most of us don't want to think about death, unless we have no other choice. Perhaps it's changing, but very frequently it has been only when forced by circumstances to face up to the fact of death and to respond to it that many of us have given much serious thought to the legitimate question, "How should a Christian view death?" Indeed, how? What about my own death? And how can my faith in Christ influence my behavior when someone I love dies?

For the most part we've treated "death" as obscenity, and have sought out euphemisms so we don't need to use "that word."

Sigmund Freud questioned whether man has the capacity to be honest about death and dying:

> It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we attempt to do so we perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators. Hence. . . no one believes in his own death; or to put the same thing another way, in the unconsciousness every one of us is convinced of his own immortality. When it comes to someone else's death . . . our habit is to lay stress on the cause of death —accident, disease, infection, advanced age; in this way we betray an effort to reduce death from a necessity to a chance event . . . Toward the actual person who died we adopt a special attitude —something almost like admiration for someone who has accomplished a very difficult task.

We talk with relative ease about most aspects of our being, but we are reluctant to share our inner thoughts and feelings about death. We discuss fond memories of happier days before the untimely death of a relative, the loneliness since the passing of a close friend, or the gratitude we knew when the sleep of death ended the prolonged suffering of someone dear to us. We can be rather matter-of-fact about many things related to death, but tension builds up inside ourselves if we must openly consider the actual fact of death itself. Is this the way it's supposed to be?

A few minutes ago my sixteen-year old daughter asked me what I'm doing. When I told her I was writing some of my thoughts about death, she asked, "Why did you pick such a depressing subject?" My mumbled response didn't impress her at all, so I choose *not* to repeat it in writing at this time!

Is it necessary to have a morbid view concerning *life's apparent ending?*

We Christians have a need to know what the holy scriptures teach concerning death. Waiting until death comes to a relative or close friend is hardly the best time to do our study. Under the emotional stress of losing loved ones, we are not able to be very objective in such study. At other, more normal times we are better able to equip ourselves for Christian responsiveness when these special times force us to confront death.

I must describe death as life's *apparent ending.* Here is where I believe the primary issue is resolved for the Christian. Living in a world that interprets death as the terminal event to life, the Christian interprets it differently. He views death not as the termination to life but rather as a transition into a larger life. Not wild speculation. Not silly superstition. Instead it's a reasonable hope validated by the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Various themes at various times are the fashionable ones. Right now *death* is "in." Books, articles, sermons, seminars, and even entire publications discuss the issue of death. I see several reasons why. There are the legal problems connected with "organ transplants." There are scientific concerns as men challenge criteria for determining when death actually occurs. There are the moral difficulties involved in deciding whether "euthanasia" is a merciful alternative to suffering, or whether it is an act of murder. These are some

reasons for the current fascination for the subject of death; surely there are others. But ours is a Christian concern. How does a Christian view death?

The Bible portrays death in a variety of ways. I will only mention a few of its characteristics. Death is *separation, sleep,* and *sure.* Death is *appointed, appropriate,* and *essential.* But to me the greater truth is that the Bible presents death as the *prelude* to *resurrection.* The Christian who looks properly *at* death inevitably looks *beyond* death.

The Master has declared boldly that, though a man dies, he will live again. Man has this longing. One reason death is such an enemy is because it poses such a threat to what man considers his "important things." The fear of extinction is overpowering. To have experienced pain too much and pleasure too little, to be forced to leave unfinished some worthwhile works, to contemplate moving out of consciousness without hoping to know the end of dreams we longed to bring into reality —; these are reasons man wants to believe there is more to death than just dying. Human aspiration, of course, is not a reason for hope. But the resurrection of Christ is!

It is no coincidence that Paul's discussion of resurrection begins with a reminder that Christ died, was buried, and was resurrected the third day according to the scriptures. The fact of the death and resurrection of Christ is the tangible assurance that death precedes resurrection. "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? . . . But Christ is risen from the dead, and is the firstfruit of those which are asleep" (1 Cor. 15:1 2, 20). It is because of the resurrection hope that it "shall be brought to pass the saying that is written 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Cor. 15:54).

I've read of all those wicked and idolatrous things behind the word "Easter." But our world has come to think of something different when it hears that word now. It speaks of a very special event, —an event that is the basis for the New Testament teaching that the Christian has a completely new and fresh perspective to life. Death and resurrection make it so. Confidence of resurrection redeems the present life, anticipates the future life, and enables the believer to face death as part of the process that leads from the smaller life to the larger life. Suddenly he finds meaning to Paul's words: "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

The resurrection of Jesus is not one of the optional extras of our faith. It is a primary feature of this faith. If Christ has not risen from the dead, our faith is vain. But if He is risen from death as history and Scripture and eyewitness testimony all affirm, then man lives his *todays* on a higher plane with a solid hope of his own eternal life that death cannot prevent.

You cannot find a nobler promise than this: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (Jn. 11:25, 26). Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, we

are able to live our lives now as a participation in eternity with God and with our Living Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus.

And that childhood prayer can be expanded to say:

If I should die before I wake
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.
But, awakened for another day,
Wilt Thou, Dear Lord, please guide my way.

Jim Hance ministers to the Pearl Street Church of Christ, Pearl and Bolivar streets, Denton, Texas 76201.

The body of Benjamin Franklin, Printer (like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding), lies here, food for worms; but the work shall not be lost, for it will (as he believed) appear once more in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by the Author. —*Epitaph on Himself (1728)*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Joe Shulam is a Jewish brother presently visiting from Jerusalem, where he hopes to build a school for believing Jews. He had the unique experience of being tried for heresy by a rabbinical court, the charge being that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. His defense must have been something else, for he was acquitted when he pointed out that even on ground of Jewish tradition there is nothing inconsistent in accepting Jesus as the Messiah. He reminded the old rabbis that the most respected rabbi of all, Rabbi Akiva, believed that old Bar Kochba (c. 200 A.D.) was the Messiah. Akiva was proved to be wrong, but still he was not excommunicated. So Joe is within his rights, even as a Jew, to believe Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah. Standing by his position as a faithful Jew who accepts Jesus, rather than a “Christian” or as one who has left the faith, there isn’t much they can do with him. But he surely must be the most unique “Church of Christ member” in the world, if that’s what he is. He is supported by a Nashville church, and that is encouraging.

In Manhattan, Kansas they are having a "Bethany Breakfast" once a month, which brings folk together from Disciples, Christian Churches, and Churches of Christ. They report that respect and understanding are early fruits of this effort, and that they enjoy breakfast together. It is this kind of grassroots crossing of lines that will make the difference in the long pull.

Some 65 preachers and professors, Baptists and Church of Christ, gathered in Houston to hear Dr. George Beasley-Murray, the British scholar who has published some good stuff on baptism. While defending "believer's baptism," he thinks it uncharitable to reject other modes. There were eight Ph.D.'s there from the Church of Christ, one of whom asked the doctor as to how he managed to state his convictions without fear of contradicting his own tradition. He replied that he did so by standing *under* the Bible rather than *on* it. The question is an appropriate one for all scholars, including those that teach in "our" schools!

A brother in a Church of Christ in Dallas sent us a copy of a letter he sent to the elders of his congregation requesting that the budget reflect a concern for the unity of the church. He explained that, while contributing some of his funds to the congregation, he felt a need to direct some of the Lord's money to efforts that strive to fulfill the Lord's prayer for the oneness of his people. He suggested that one important thing to do is to encourage saints to gather in prayer for the unity of the church.

Our brother, Jack Gilbert, writing in the *Gospel Guardian* defines a gospel preacher as one "who draws a circle around those things and declares that things outside the circle, i.e., sprinkling, mechanical instruments and sponsoring churches, are wrong and will lead straight to Hell."

The *Christian Appeal,* published in Amarillo, recently had a special issue on "Why Be Baptized?" Writers set forth nine different reasons, or blessings involved, for being immersed. No suggestion was made that one has to have knowledge of these in order for the baptism to be valid. They wrote as if only faith and repentance were conditions, not knowledge.

A church in St. Louis (Lemay Ferry Road) has "with-drawn fellowship" from two well-known preachers, Stan Shipp and Landon Saunders, who were not even members of their congregation, Landon even living in a distant state! One charge against Stan was that he allowed sisters to talk to their Father along with their brothers (except that they didn't put it that way!) But what should interest us in this case is an eldership's assumed prerogatives over souls committed to the care of other shepherds. Stan and Landon should request data from said congregation as to when they were accepted into the fellowship of that church. How can elders withdraw from folk they've never received?

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READERS' EXCHANGE

I notice that you say that the church has no name at all. Of course the church (Bride) has a name, but you won't find it in the NT. How would you like to be attached to a nameless woman or bride? You will find the God-given name is Hephzi-bah (Is. 62:4). I am starting a drive to have Churches of Christ take down their signs reading "Churches of Christ" and underscored by Ro. 16:16 and have them replaced by "Hephzi-bah" and underscored by Is. 62:4. Different localities can further identify themselves as "Non-Instrumental" or "UnColored" or whatever. This would make us super-scriptural, don't you think? But I ain't expecting no stampede! - *F. L. Lemley,* 128 *N. Norwine, Bonne Terre, Mo. 63628*

I spent a little time with the Church of Christ in our town. We have two of them here, one that uses literature and one that doesn't. It broke my heart to note their refusal to accept me as a brother in Christ. I didn't realize that our salvation was dependent upon the right or wrong use of instrumental music. By the way, I am an organist and pianist, so I guess I am really off the track. But it is such periodicals as *Restoration Review* and *Mission Messenger* that is encouraging to me. We had a lady sing with an interdenominational group in the city at our church. She was from the Church of Christ. I told her in public that it was great to get to know other members in the family of God. —*A. William Johnson, First Christian Church, 432 E. Pleasant, Tulare, Ca. 93274*

(The Restoration Movement was launched on the premise that fellowship is based only upon what is clearly set forth in scripture and not upon private opinions. Those who make the instrument a test of fellowship are violating that principle rather than upholding it. —*Ed.*)

I've been getting your little paper for about two years now, and its been such a blessing to me. I get papers from all sides of the Restoration Spectrum. When yours and Carl's *Mission Messenger* hit the mailbox, its like a breath of fresh air. Reading diverse material is a great learning experience. My only sorrow is that Mission *Messenger* will close this year, for it has been such a blessing to me. —*Jack E. Wallace, 4114 Sunrise Blvd., S., Mogadore, Oh. 44260*

(While there is no way to replace *Mission Messenger,* it will be good news to many that Carl Ketcherside will be writing for this paper, beginning the month following the cessation of his own paper. Details of this will be given in the fall. —*Ed.*)

I read your article "Textuary vs. Expository Teaching (or Preaching)" and I appreciate your interest in keeping Bible texts in their context. But may I exhort you to do the same thing in your articles in *Restoration Review!* Re-read your own articles, especially the one bearing the above title and be reminded that you are guilty of doing what you accused one

of your teachers who delivered the sermon in Ryman Auditorium. What did he teach in that textual sermon that fouled up the scripture so grossly? The Bible is its own best interpreter and the analogy of the Faith (Ro. 12:6) will bear this fact out. —*Jimmy Vest, Chestnut Dr. Church of Christ, Doraville, Ga. 30340*

(The text he fouled up was "If a man hath not the spirit of Christ he is none of his" in Ro. 8:9. He made this apply to having the attitude or temperament that Jesus had, especially in reference to truth and error. In my article I endeavored to point out that in its context this is referring to the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this journal we make no claim of being completely free of the errors we seek to correct, just as any other teacher in any other teaching situation. But we thank our brother for the admonition and we shall give heed. —*Ed.*)

Especially did I appreciate reading again the clear distinction between the good news and the didache. Since being convinced of the difference myself and having tried to share it with others, 1 find how deeply entrenched tradition is. I have asked many to give *one* verse where the two are the same and used inter-changeably or where the good news is to be heralded to the assembly of believers, but I haven't had the first verse mentioned yet. The other day I saw a list of "sermons" that a brother was giving to an assembly of believers, advertised as a "gospel" meeting. The subjects included the orphan home issue and liberalism in the church. I thought, what a terrible abuse of such a tremendous word! - *Michael Hall,* 1515 *Huron St., Niles, Mi. 49120*

I received the supply of back issues. I read one every day, and will probably read them all again. All I can say is that I never got such a bargain for three bucks. - *J. A. Poer, Crown Point, In. 46307*

(Others of you might try this. We'll send you a random selection of back issues, dating back ten years or more, 18 of them for 3.00 while they last. —*Ed.)*

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